

THERMAL BARRIER COATINGS FOR THE SPACE SHUTTLE
MAIN ENGINE TURBINE BLADES

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The Space Shuttle Main Engine (SSME) turbopump turbine blades experience extremely severe thermal shocks during start-up and shut-down. For instance, the high pressure fuel turbopump turbine which burns liquid hydrogen operates at approximately 1500°F, but is shut down fuel rich with turbine blades quenched in liquid hydrogen (-423°F). This thermal shock is a major contributor to blade cracking. The same thermal shock causes the protective ZrO₂ thermal barrier coatings to spall or flake off, leaving only the NiCrAlY bond coating which provides only a minimum thermal protection. The turbine blades are therefore life limited to about 3000 sec. for want of a good thermal barrier coating.

NASA-MSFC is active in developing a suitable thermal barrier coating (TBC) for the SSME turbine blades. Various TBCs developed for the gas turbine engines were tested in a specially built turbine blade tester (also called thermal cycling tester or burner rig, Figure 1). This tester subjects the coated blades to thermal and pressure cycles similar to those during actual operation of the turbine (Figures 2, 3). The coatings were applied using a plasma spraying technique, both under atmospheric conditions and in vacuum. Results are given in Table 1. In general vacuum plasma sprayed coatings performed much better than those sprayed under atmospheric conditions. A 50-50 blend of Cr₂O₃ and NiCrAlY, vacuum plasma sprayed on SSME turbopump turbine blades appear to provide significant improvements in coating durability and thermal protection.

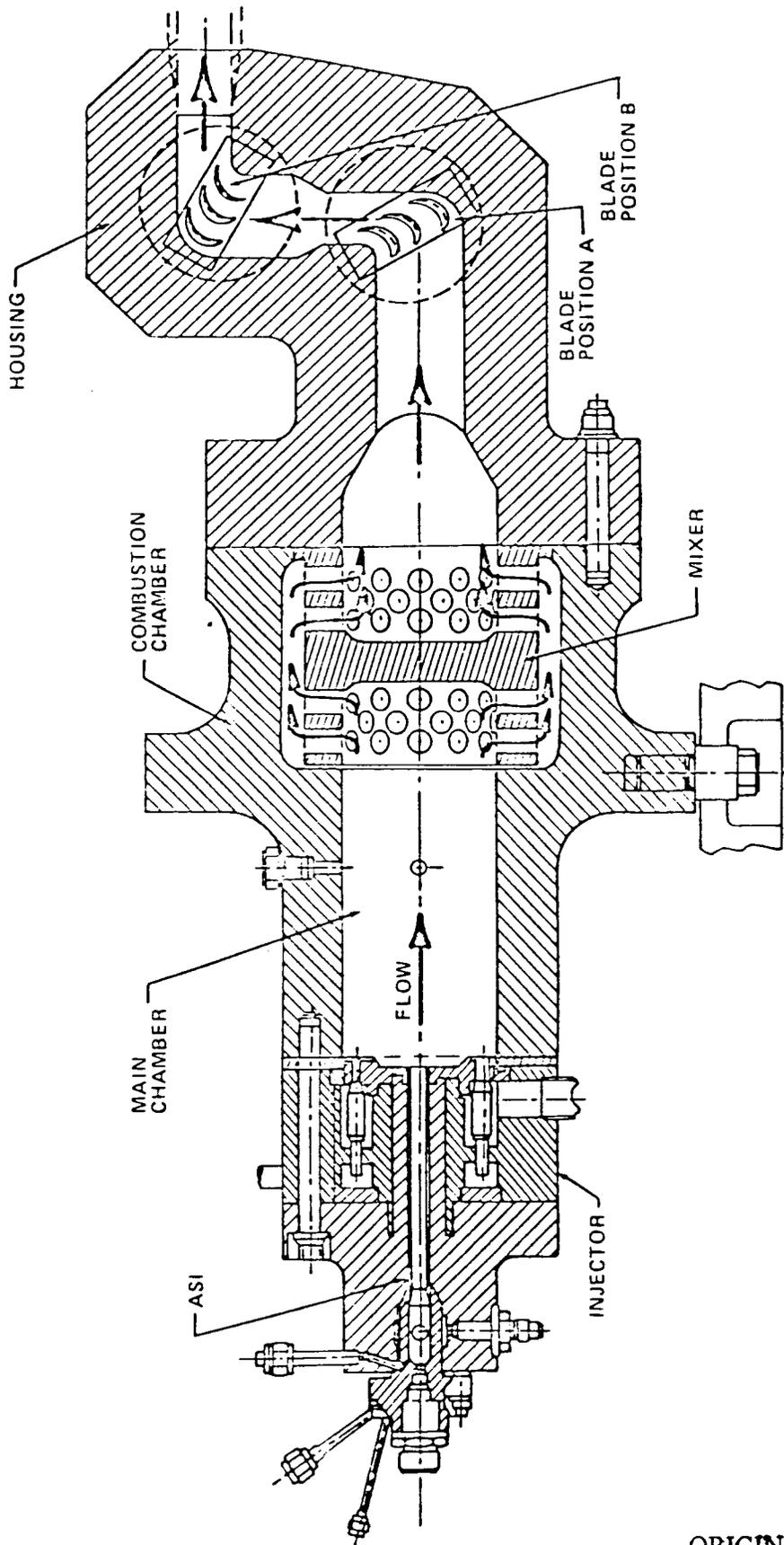


FIGURE 1. THERMAL CYCLING TESTER

R-TEST 338

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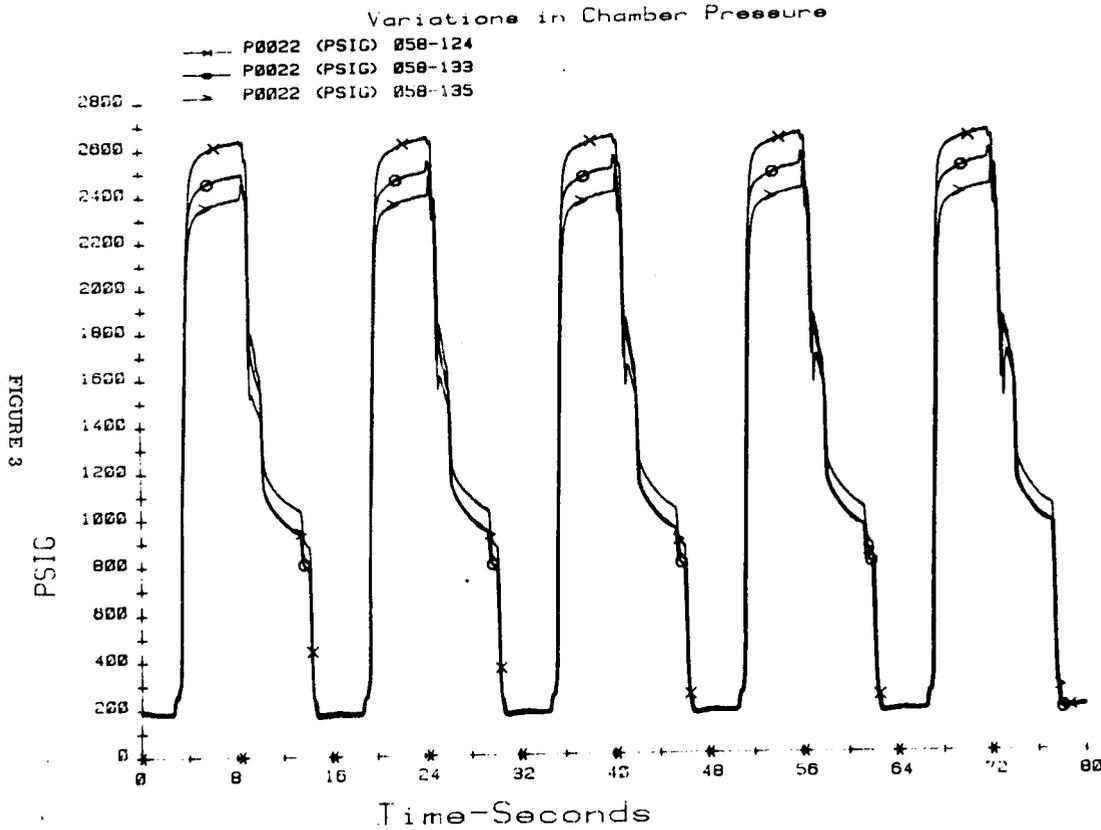
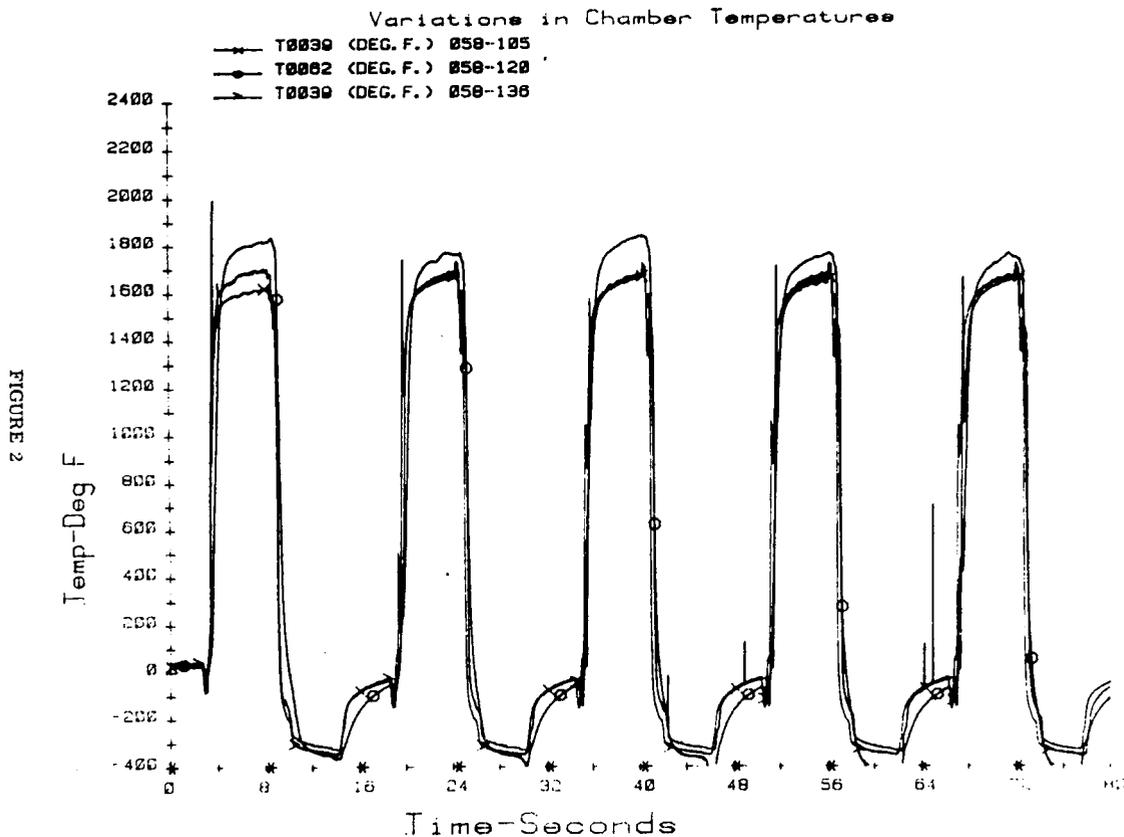
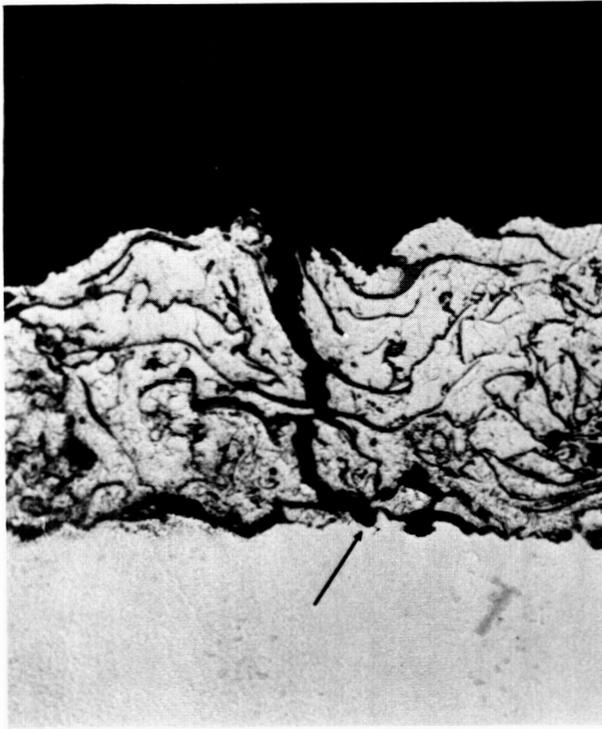
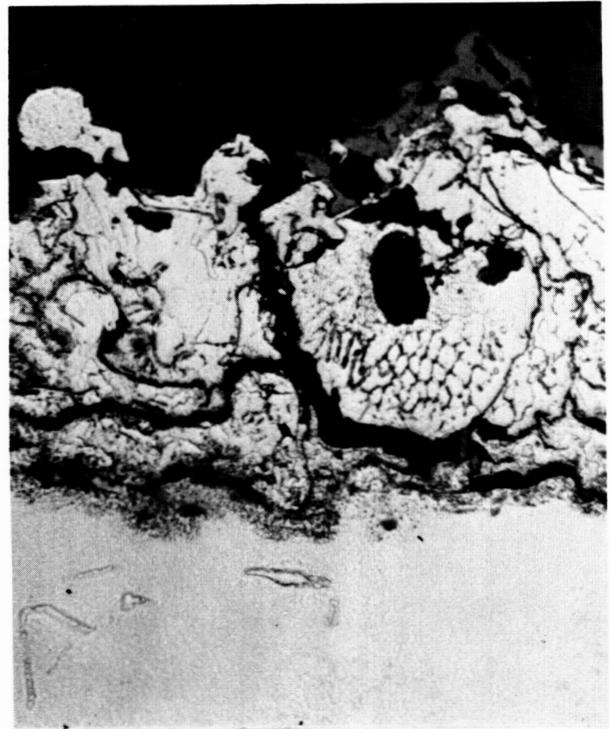


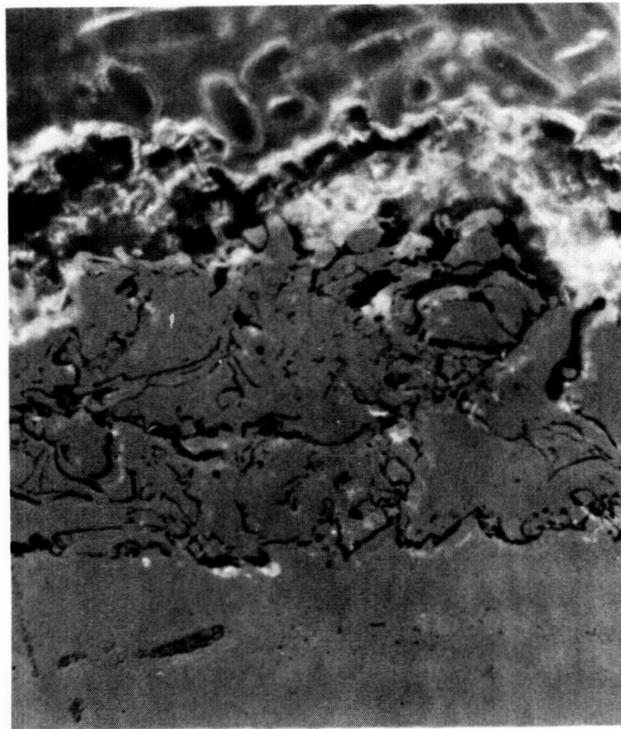
FIGURE 3



A



B



C

Figure 4 - NiCrAlY Airfoil Leading Edge Cracking on Blade 9Z13 From HPFTP 9005 (A&B) and Thin Layer of Zirconia on NiCrAlY (C).
Mag. 400X

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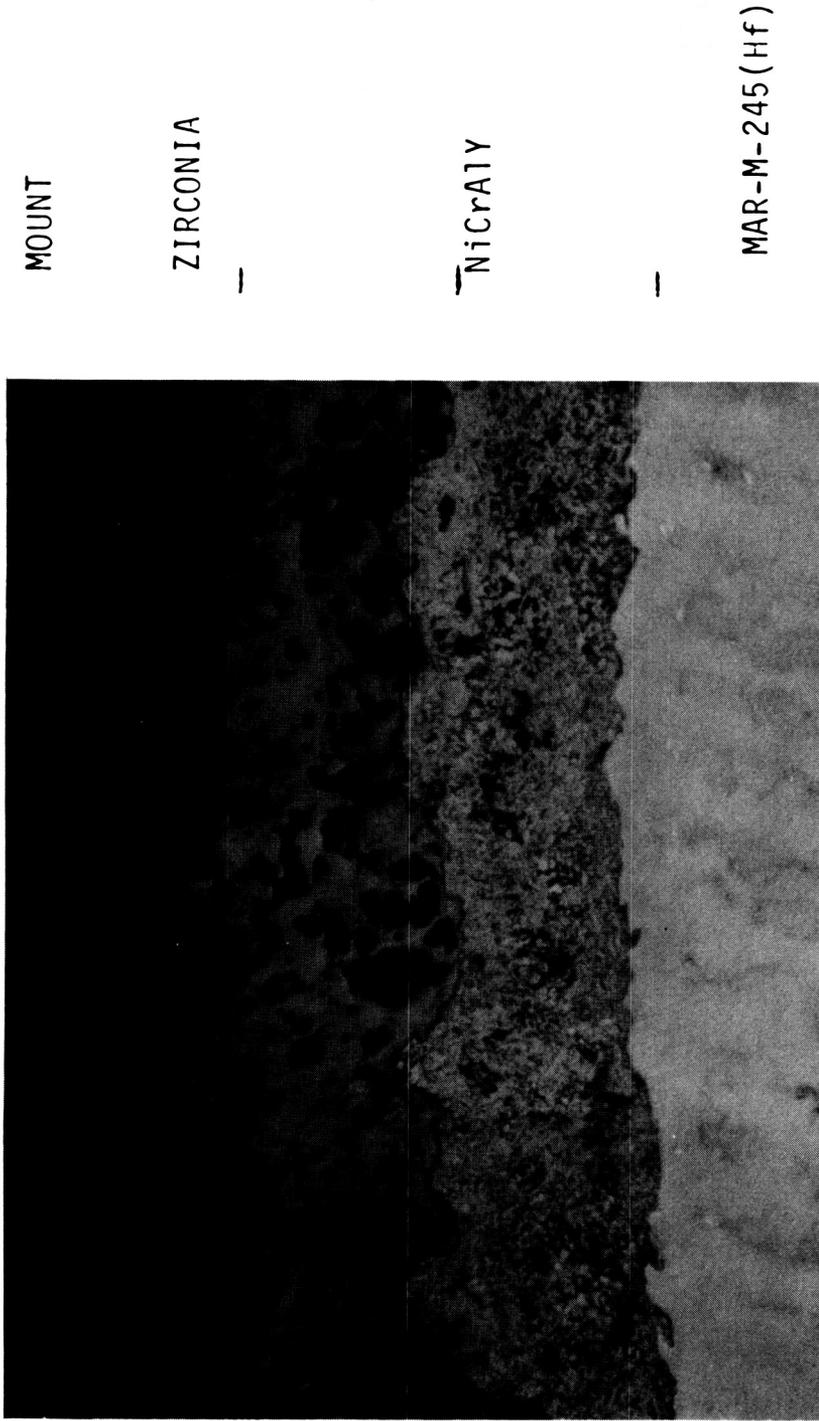


Figure 5 - NiCrAlY Airfoil Leading Edge Applied by Low Pressure Plasma
Flame Spray Showing Improvements: (1) No cracks in NiCrAlY
bond coating. (2) No oxide layers in NiCrAlY bond coating

Mag. 200X

TABLE 1
 PLASMA COATED TURBINE BLADES
 BURNER RIG CYCLIC THERMAL TESTING
 25 CYCLES (1700°F TO -350°F)

| <u>VACUUM SPRAY POWER MESH</u> | <u>BOND COATING*</u> | <u>THERMAL BARRIER COATING (4 MIL)</u> | <u>RATING** 100=PERFECT</u> | <u>COMMENTS</u> |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| -200/+325 | NiCrAlY | - | 95 | NO SPALLING |
| -400 | CoCrAlY | - | 94 | NO SPALLING |
| -400 | NiCrAlY | - | 93 | NO SPALLING |
| -200/+325 | NiCrAlY | Cr ₂ O ₃ .50 NiCrAlY | 94 | NO SPALLING |
| -400 | CoCrAlY | Cr ₂ O ₃ .50 CoCrAlY | 94 | NO SPALLING |
| -400 | NiCrAlY | Cr ₂ O ₃ .50 NiCrAlY | 93 | NO SPALLING |
| -200/+325 | NiCoCrAlY | - | 25 | SPALLING |
| <u>ATMOSPHERIC SPRAY</u> | | | | |
| <u>SSME BASELINE</u> | | | | |
| -200/+325 | NiCrAlY | - | 35 | SPALLING |

* BOND COATING ONLY : 6 MIL THICKNESS
 BOND COATING BEFORE ADDING THERMAL BARRIER COATING: 3 MIL THICKNESS

** 3 BLADES EACH SAMPLE